

# Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546  
760-924-1800 phone, 760-924-1801 fax  
commdev@mono.ca.gov

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P.O. Box 8  
Bridgeport, CA 93517  
760-932-5420 phone, 760-932-5431 fax  
[www.monocounty.ca.gov](http://www.monocounty.ca.gov)

## CPT MINUTES

April 1, 2004

(Adopted June 3, 2004)

Members Present: Chair John Cecil, Mono Supervisors; Katy Walton, Caltrans; Bill Dunkelberger, BLM; Beverly Cheeseboro, LADWP alternate; John Eastman, Mammoth Lakes Town Council

Members Absent: Denyse Racine, DFG; Kathy Lucich, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; Jeff Bailey, USFS/Inyo; Joseph Saulque, Benton Paiute Reservation; Cindi Mitton, Lahontan RWQCB; Chris Plakos, LADWP; Art Sam, Bridgeport Indian Colony

Staff Present: Scott Burns, C.D. Ritter

Guests Present: Tom Higley, USFS/Inyo; Vikki Magee-Bauer, Mono Supervisor-elect; Steve Nelson, BLM; Ericka Spies, MCWD; George Shirk, Mammoth Monthly magazine; John Walter, Sierra Club; Mike McKenna, The Sheet news

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1. **CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE:** Chair John Cecil called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. and led the flag salute.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** No items.
3. **MINUTES:** Approve minutes of March 4, 2004. (Eastman/Dunkelberger. Ayes: All.)
4. **AGENCY ROUNDTABLE:** Members outlined agency planning issues and upcoming projects.
5. **SIERRA NEVADA FRAMEWORK RECORD OF DECISION/SUPPLEMENTAL EIS**

Tom Higley, USFS/Inyo sale prep forester/silviculturist, presented a PowerPoint on the recent revision of the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment. Unless the present plan is improved, large, old trees, wildlife habitat, homes and local communities would increasingly be destroyed. The directive of using fire itself to thin the forest is sometimes too risky.

The amendment focuses on fuels reduction strategy and reducing the threat of wildfire. Preservation of large (30-inch diameter) old trees on the landscape is a priority. The preference is 15-30 large trees per acre instead of 1,500-2,000 smaller trees. Trees less than 30 inches in diameter do not attract outside commercial interests because they do not generate as much money as larger trees, but local firewood companies provide a bonus to the forest by cutting even 6" to 8" trees. An estimated 90 million trees measure 20-30 inches in diameter, 2 percent of which would be removed each year at strategic sites to reduce wildfires.

Pines need growing space, as roots often extend up to 60'. Pines also are intolerant of shade. Trees compete for water and grow slower on the east side of the Sierra. More-aggressive thinning leads to healthier forests.

Strategically Placed Area Treatments (SPLATs) reduce fire intensity and rate of spread, thus increasing the chance of stopping a fire. Fuel reduction costs range from \$200 to \$600 per acre.

A 90-day appeal period on the Final SEIS and Decision began Jan. 22, 2004. Higley indicated that the State of California is filing an appeal on the basis of controversial data that can be used for opposing interpretations.

## 6. SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION UPDATE

Steve Nelson, BLM ecologist, has studied sage grouse since 1988. Currently, the grouse is a huge issue throughout the nation as well as Mono County. In the late 1990s there was lots of chatter about range-wide listing. The states have the lead in conservation planning. Nevada has been

particularly active, with local planning groups of diverse people. California does not have a statewide strategy, so

has collaborated with Nevada in the Bi-State group for more than two years. Nevada Governor Kenny Gwinn wants a plan for the sage grouse in hand by June 2004.

The American Ornithological Society designates species that have genetic, behavioral and morphological (appearance) differences. Currently, only two species are recognized. In winter, grouse eat nothing but sagebrush and move about 10 miles at most. Major threats to grouse include hunting, displacement of sagebrush by pinyon or juniper, improper grazing in nesting areas, and landfills attracting fox, coyote, ravens and gulls that feast on grouse eggs.

Sage grouse populations are set up in five management units. The White Mountain unit has the largest population of grouse, but needs data to avoid making bad decisions. There has been no public involvement, and very little information is available. The Bodie Hills unit is comprised of 18% private lands, including meadows. Telemetry studies have been conducted since 2000, and there has been strong public participation. The South Mono unit has concerns about development, recreation, fire, landfills, airport (not so much the airport itself as what comes with it) and highways, but no consensus has been reached. The other defined units are Fales/Desert Creek and Topaz/Pine Nuts.

Nelson indicated that the land pattern in Mono County is laid out for grazing, agriculture, mining, etc., not development. The BLM does not want the grouse listed, believing it can preserve the birds and take care of their habitat. Federal agencies would take most of the pressure if the sage grouse were listed, but potentially it would change life for Mono County residents. Every proposal would incur several additional months, creating a cumbersome process. Nelson believes it is important that CPT engage the topic more, as help is needed from USFS and county planners. Private solutions could help as well. The BLM plans to distribute grouse-friendly information on what people can do to take care of grouse (e.g., fencing).

## **7. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**WETLANDS:** A contract has been signed for the two \$198,000 grants awarded to West Walker River and Upper Owens River/Mono Basin. The subcommittee of 10-15 people spent three years getting a signed contract. The group's next meeting will be a lengthy discussion of budget and contract issues. A stakeholder process via RPACs is needed to gather information. A management plan not only would put into perspective potential impacts, but also include players outside agency spheres. An index with contact persons will be compiled.

**LAND ADJUSTMENT:** A confusing on-site process exists in Crowley Lake and June Lake. A Memorandum of Understanding is needed between Mono County and USFS.

**BRIDGEPORT VISITOR CENTER:** The Bridgeport community supports the location of a visitor center there and appreciates the approved study grant.

- 8. SET NEXT MEETING:** Many agency members plan to attend the May 6 groundbreaking ceremony at the Interagency Visitor Center in Lone Pine, so the May meeting was canceled. The next meeting will be held Thursday, June 3, 2004, at 9 a.m.

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- A. Fuel breaks: USFS
- B. CPT Year in Review 2003
- C. ESETS (Eastern Sierra Expanded Transit System): USFS/Hogan
- D. Geothermal projects: Mammoth Pacific/Sullivan
- E. Watershed planning: Agrarian Research/Scheidlinger

- 9. ADJOURN:** 12:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, C.D. Ritter, team secretary